

THE TITANIC

by ELBERT HUBBARD



Tis a night of a thousand stars. The date, Sunday, April 14, 1912. The time, 11:20 P. M. The place, off Cape Race—that Cemetery of the Sea. Suddenly a silence comes—the engines have stopped—the great iron heart of the ship has ceased to beat. Such a silence is always ominous to those who go down to the sea in ships.



“The engines have stopped! ”

Eyes peer; ears listen; startled minds wait!

A half-minute goes by.

Then the great ship groans, as her keel grates and grinds. She reels, rocks, struggles as if to free herself from a titanic grasp, and as she rights herself, people standing lose their center of gravity.

Not a shock—only about the same sensation that one feels when the ferryboat slides into her landing-slip, with a somewhat hasty hand at the wheel.

On board the ferry we know what has happened—here we do not.

“An iceberg!” some one cries.

The word is passed along.

“Only an iceberg! Barely grated it—side-swiped it—that is all! Ah, ha! ”

The few on deck, and some of those in cabins peering out of portholes, see a great white mass go gliding by.

A shower of broken ice has covered the decks. Passengers pick up specimens “for souvenirs to carry home,” they laughingly say.

Five minutes pass—the engines start again—but only for an instant.

Again the steam is shut off. Then the siren-whistles cleave and saw the frosty air.

¶ Silence and the sirens! Alarm, but no tumult—but why blow the whistles when there is no fog!

The cold is piercing. Some who have come up on deck return to their cabins for wraps and overcoats.

The men laugh—and a few nervously smoke.

It is a cold, clear night of stars. There is no moon. The sea is smooth as a Summer pond.

The great towering iceberg that loomed above the topmost mast has done its work, gone on, disappeared, piloted by its partners, the darkness and the night.

¶ “There was no iceberg—you only imagined it,” a man declares.

“Go back to bed—there is no danger—this ship can not sink anyway!” says the Managing Director of the Company.

In a lull of the screaming siren, a hoarse voice is heard calling through a megaphone from the bridge—“Man the lifeboats! Women and children first!!”

“It sounds just like a play,” says Henry Harris to Major Butt.

Stewards and waiters are giving out life-preservers and showing passengers how to put them on.

There is laughter—a little hysterical. “I want my clothes made to order,” a woman protests. “An outrageous fit! Give me a man’s size!”

The order of the Captain on the bridge is repeated by other officers—"Man the lifeboats! Women and children first!"

"It's a boat-drill—that's all!"

"A precautionary measure—we'll be going ahead soon," says George Widener to his wife, in reassuring tones as he holds her hand.

Women are loath to get into the boats. Officers, not over-gently, seize them, and half-lift and push them in. Children, crying, and some half-asleep, are passed over into the boats.

Mother-arms reach out and take the little ones. Parentage and ownership are lost sight of.

Some boats are only half-filled, so slow are the women to believe that rescue is necessary.

The boats are lowered, awkwardly, for there has never been a boat-drill, and assignments are being made haphazard.

A sudden little tilt of the deck hastens the proceeding. The bows of the ship are settling—there is a very perceptible list to starboard.

An Englishman, tired and blasé, comes out of the smoking-room, having just ceased a card-game. He very deliberately approaches an officer who is loading women and children into a lifeboat.

The globe-trotting Briton is filling his pipe. "I si, orficer, you know; what seems to be the matter with this bloomin' craft, you know?"

"Fool," roars the officer, "the ship is sinking!"

"Well," says the Englishman, as he strikes a match on the rail, "Well, you know, if she is sinking, just let 'er down a little easy, you know."

John Jacob Astor half-forces his wife into the boat. She submits, but much against her will. He climbs over and takes a seat beside her in the lifeboat. It is a ruse to get her in—he kisses her tenderly—stands up, steps lightly out and gives his place to a woman.

"Lower away!" calls the officer.

"Wait—here is a boy—his mother is in there!"

"Lower away!" calls the officer—"there is no more room."

Colonel Astor steps back. George Widener tosses him a woman's hat, picked up from the deck. Colonel Astor jams the hat on the boy's head, takes the lad up in his arms, runs to the rail and calls, "You won't leave this little girl, will you?"

¶ "Drop her into the boat," shouts the officer. The child drops into friendly hands as the boat is lowered.

Astor turns to Widener and laughingly says, "Well, we put one over on 'em that time."

"I'll meet you in New York," calls Colonel Astor to his wife as the boat pulls off. He lights a cigarette and passes the silver case and a match-box along to the other men.

A man runs back to his cabin to get a box of money and jewels. The box is worth three hundred thousand dollars. The man changes his mind and gets three oranges, and gives one orange each to three children as they are lifted into safety.

As a lifeboat is being lowered, Mr. and Mrs. Isador Straus come running with arms full of blankets, brought from their stateroom. They throw the bedding to the people in the boat.

"Help that woman in!" shouts an officer. Two sailors seize Mrs. Straus. She struggles, frees herself, and proudly says, "Not I—I will not leave my husband." Mr. Straus insists, quietly and gently, that she shall go. He will follow later. ¶ But Mrs. Straus is firm. "All these years we have traveled together, and shall we part now? No, our fate is one."

She smiles a quiet smile, and pushes aside the hand of Major Butt, who has ordered the sailors to leave her alone. "We will help you—Mr. Straus and I—come! It is the law of the sea—women and children first—come!" said Major Butt.

"No, Major; you do not understand. I remain with my husband—we are one, no matter what comes—you do not understand!"

"See," she cried, as if to change the subject, "there is a woman getting in the lifeboat with her baby; she has no wraps!"

Mrs. Straus tears off her fur-lined robe and places it tenderly around the woman and the innocently sleeping babe.

William T. Stead, grim, hatless, with furrowed face, stands with an iron bar in hand as a lifeboat is lowered. "Those men in the steerage, I fear, will make a rush—they will swamp the boats."

Major Butt draws his revolver. He looks toward the crowded steerage. Then he puts his revolver back into his pocket, smiles. "No, they know we will save their women and children as quickly as we will our own."

Mr. Stead tosses the iron bar into the sea.

He goes to the people crowding the afterdeck. They speak a polyglot language. They cry, they pray, they supplicate, they kiss each other in frenzied grief. ¶ John B. Thayer, George Widener, Henry Harris, Benjamin Guggenheim, Charles M. Hays, Mr. and Mrs. Straus, move among these people, talk to them and try to reassure them.

There are other women besides Mrs. Straus who will not leave their husbands. These women clasp each other's hands. They smile—they understand!

Mr. Guggenheim and his secretary are in full dress. "If we are going to call on Neptune, we will go dressed as gentlemen," they laughingly say.

The ship is slowly settling by the head.

The forward deck is below the water.

The decks are at a vicious angle.

The icy waters are full of struggling people.

Those still on the ship climb up from deck to deck.

The dark waters follow them, angry, jealous, savage, relentless.

The decks are almost perpendicular. The people hang by the rails.

A terrific explosion occurs—the ship's boilers have burst.

The last lights go out.

The great iron monster slips, slides, gently glides, surely, down, down, down into the sea.

Where once the great ship proudly floated, there is now a mass of wreckage, the dead, the dying, and the great black all-enfolding night.

Overhead, the thousand stars shine with a brightness unaccustomed.

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THE Strauses, Stead, Astor, Butt, Harris, Thayer, Widener, Guggenheim, Hays—I thought I knew you, just because I had seen you, realized somewhat of your able qualities, looked into your eyes and pressed your hands, but I did not guess your greatness.

You are now beyond the reach of praise—flattery touches you not—words for you are vain.

Medals for heroism—how cheap the gilt, how paltry the pewter!

You are beyond our praise or blame. We reach out, we do not touch you. We call, but you do not hear.

Words unkind, ill-considered, were sometimes flung at you, Colonel Astor, in your lifetime. We admit your handicap of wealth—pity you for the accident of birth—but we congratulate you that as your mouth was stopped with the brine of the sea, so you stopped the mouths of the carpers and critics with the dust of the tomb.

¶ If any think unkindly of you now, be he priest or plebeian, let it be with finger to his lips, and a look of shame into his own dark heart.

Also, shall we not write a postscript to that booklet on cigarettes?

Charles M. Hays—you who made life safe for travelers on shore, yet you were caught in a sea-trap, which, had you been manager of that Transatlantic Line, would never have been set, baited as it was with human lives.

You placed safety above speed: You fastened your faith to utilities, not futilities. You and John B. Thayer would have had a searchlight and used it in the danger-zone, so as to have located an iceberg five miles away. You would have filled the space occupied by that silly plunge-bath (how ironic the thing) with a hundred collapsible boats, and nests of dories.

You, Hays and Thayer, believed in other men—you trusted them—this time they failed you. We pity them, not you.

And Mr. and Mrs. Straus, I envy you that legacy of love and loyalty left to your children and grandchildren. The calm courage that was yours all your long and useful career was your possession in death.

You knew how to do three great things—you knew how to live, how to love and how to die.

Archie Butt, the gloss and glitter on your spangled uniform were pure gold. I always suspected it.

You tucked the ladies in the lifeboats, as if they were going for an automobile-ride. "Give my regards to the folks at home," you gaily called as you lifted your hat and stepped back on the doomed deck.

You died the gallant gentleman that you were. You helped preserve the old English tradition, "Women and children first."

All America is proud of you.

Guggenheim, Widener and Harris, you were unfortunate in life in having more money than we had. That is why we wrote things about you, and printed them in black and red. If you were sports, you were game to the last, cheerful losers, and all such are winners.

As your souls play hide-and-seek with sirens and dance with the naiads, you have lost interest in us. But our hearts are with you still. You showed us how death and danger put all on a parity. The women in the steerage were your sisters—the men your brothers; and on the tablets of love and memory we have 'graved your names.

William T. Stead, you were a writer, a thinker, a speaker, a doer of the word. You proved your case; sealed the brief with your heart's blood; and as your bearded face looked in admiration for the last time up at the twinkling, shining stars, God in pardonable pride said to Gabriel, "Here comes a man!"

And so all you I knew, and all that thousand and half a thousand more, I did not know, passed out of this Earth-Life into the Unknown upon the unforgetting tide. You were sacrificed to the greedy Goddess of Luxury and her consort the Demon of Speed.

Was it worth the while? Who shall say? The great lessons of life are learned only in blood and tears. Fate decreed that you should die for us.

Happily, the world has passed forever from a time when it feels a sorrow for the dead. The dead are at rest, their work is ended, they have drunk of the waters of Lethe, and these are rocked in the cradle of the deep. We kiss our hands to them and cry, "Hail and Farewell—until we meet again!"

But for the living who wait for a footstep that will never come, and all those who listen for a voice that will never more be heard, our hearts go out in tenderness, love and sympathy.

These dead have not lived and died in vain. They have brought us all a little nearer together—we think better of our kind.

One thing sure, there are just two respectable ways to die. One is of old age, and the other is by accident.

All disease is indecent.

Suicide is atrocious.

But to pass out as did Mr. and Mrs. Isador Straus is glorious. Few have such a privilege. Happy lovers, both. In life they were never separated, and in death they are not divided.